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NC POLICY WATCH

Stories & voices
that **matter.**

Awash in pollution: Restoring North Carolina's sick rivers to health will require a major policy about-face

By [Lisa Sorg](#)

Kemp Burdette, the Cape Fear Riverkeeper: "I'm raising my two daughters on the river. They drink the water every day. That fact worries me." (Photo: Cape Fear River Watch)

Like most people who grow up on the water, Kemp Burdette is different from his landlocked friends. Undeterred by dampness, wary but not terrified of alligators, he is in tune with the calm and the fury of the Cape Fear River. He has paddled its entire 202-mile length. He knows every bend from its headwaters in Hayward, at the border of Lee and Chatham counties, to its mouth at the Atlantic Ocean.

He grew up in Wilmington and has spent nearly his entire life there, drinking the city's water, which comes from the river, every day. The river literally is part of him. His family is raising their two young daughters in Wilmington. The river is also part of them.

His experience with the Cape Fear brought him to Raleigh yesterday, where he urged the [House Select Committee on River Quality](#) to more stringently regulate industry and the contaminants they routinely discharge in the state's waterways. "The way we regulate contaminants is like Russian roulette," Burdette said. "We should require industry to show their waste streams don't endanger human health and the environment. The state may warrant stronger protections than at the federal level."

It's unfortunate that besides the committee chairs and co-chairs, only four of the nine members of the rank-and-file membership -- Representatives Pricey Harrison, Jimmy Dixon, Bob Steinburg and Bill Brisson -- were present for Burdette's speech. Because the legislature, particularly in the past six years, has routinely passed laws that have weakened environmental protections. [\[Read more...\]](#)

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